



State of Wisconsin  
Department of Public Instruction  
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\*\*\* A NATIONAL LIBRARY WEEK EDITORIAL \*\*\*

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### Strong libraries valuable to Wisconsin

*By State Superintendent Elizabeth Burmaster*

It is in times of hardship that it is most important to find ways to connect with others. This year's National Library Week theme, "Worlds connect @ your library," reminds us that libraries are a destination for exploring and uniting within our communities and beyond.

From story time, to conquering the first chapter book, to cramming for high school and college exams, to job searches and retirement planning, libraries are vital resources for lifelong learning and strong communities. Wisconsin residents checked out 60 million items last year from public libraries and made more than 33 million library visits. Wisconsin residents made more than 4 million reference requests, and an increasing number of those came through the AskAway virtual reference service. Internet-based library services through BadgerLink, the state's on-line library, are seeing growth as well. Over the past two years, residents conducted more than 18 million searches of the service's full text resources annually, an increase of more than 3 million searches from previous years.

The American Library Association and libraries across the nation sponsor National Library Week each April. It is a time to recognize and celebrate libraries and library workers for the services they provide their communities. The committee that developed National Library Week strived to encourage people to read in their leisure time and to support strong and happy family lives. These goals were noble for the first National Library Week in 1958, and they are still great aspirations for today.

Trained library professionals in our school and public libraries know how to search for answers online or in library collections, but they do so much more for their communities. In light of the current economic situation, libraries across the state are setting up career centers for their patrons in cooperation

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with job centers and technical colleges. Wisconsin public librarians are joining forces with educators in a five-year statewide project focused on serving our teens. The Adolescent Literacy Initiative supports efforts to improve student achievement. Libraries are an integral part of increasing reading skills in our middle and high school students. Greater achievements come from greater reading skills.

A study of public library use in Wisconsin has shown that usage continues to increase as libraries offer more technology and services for their patrons. Wisconsin libraries contribute more than three-quarters of a billion dollars to the state economy annually as well as returning a benefit of over \$4 to taxpayers for each dollar spent.

Strong libraries are valuable to Wisconsin. The reluctant reader can find a mentor in a friendly librarian and perhaps spark a passion for lifelong learning. Teachers may gather supportive or supplementary material for their classroom, allowing lessons to come alive and ignite student interest. Parenting resources can provide insights for families, and entrepreneurs have access to a vast array of business planning materials through the library.

No matter your interest or need, libraries remain a great well of resources for users. In honor of National Library Week, April 12 to 18, I encourage all citizens to visit their local library and find out how “Worlds connect @ your library.”

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*Elizabeth Burmaster is the elected state superintendent of public instruction.*

**NOTES:** A high-resolution photo of the state superintendent is available on the Department of Public Instruction “Media Contacts and Resources” webpage at <http://dpi.wi.gov/eis/vm-media.html>. This editorial is available electronically at [http://dpi.wi.gov/eis/pdf/dpi2009\\_34.pdf](http://dpi.wi.gov/eis/pdf/dpi2009_34.pdf). A National Library Week proclamation from State Superintendent Elizabeth Burmaster also is available online at <http://dpi.wi.gov/eis/pdf/nlwproc09.pdf>.